

Who Will Make the Difference?

Luke 17:11-19, Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7

Sermon Series: *Why Should I Follow Jesus?*

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem from Galilee. In terms of the Kansas City area (where I live), he was perhaps traveling from St. Joseph toward Waldo (perhaps toward the Temple known as Crossroads Church!). Of course, to get there the fastest way was to go through Kansas City North—the Northland! In the Bible, this land was known as Samaria. It is where a difference race of people lived.

Jesus was still a long way from Waldo (Jerusalem). And as he entered Gladstone (just before North Kansas City), ten lepers approached him. They kept their distance, since that was a legal requirement KCMO Dept. of Health. This was because they were suspected of being highly contagious.

So they kept their distance and called out, saying, “Jesus, have mercy on us! Heal us!” Jesus must have heard them yelling, then saw them and said, “Go and show yourselves to the official doctors.” Amazingly enough, they left Jesus and headed south toward the Department of Health! “And as they went, they were made clean.” They were healed!

Just one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan, a Northlander! Jesus asked, “Weren’t there some other guys with you? Were not ten healed? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”
(Luke 17: 11-19)

Jesus was teaching more than just a lesson in good manners—that it was important to say “Thank you.” He was teaching that God’s healing and acceptance were available for everyone regardless of race, creed, or zip code. Another interesting lesson was that ingratitude did not negate the healing. So, where do you see yourself in this story? Perhaps you were among the nine who forgot to say thank you or maybe you were the one who remembered?

There is a level of meaning in this story that leads me to another reason why I should follow Jesus. After the story, we don’t know what tenth leper did with the rest of his life. But when I see myself as that leper, the tenth one who was healed, then it matters what I do with the healing I’ve experienced.

In my last sermon, I talked about taking stock of our lives; about that exercise in which we imagine ourselves at the end of our lives looking back. We make choices about how we want to live now and forward into our future--not wanting our lives to be wasted or to feel meaningless. Jesus showed us how to live lives worthy of ourselves (reason #4). He always pointed beyond himself and showed us what is ultimately true about life (reason #3). He revealed the sense of abundance that is available to each/all of us (reason #2). Finally, he let us in on the divine secret of joy (reason #1).

As we continue to ask, “Why should we follow Jesus?” here is my reason #5: God invites us (calls us) to live as the heroes of our own story: to receive the healing of knowing who we are, discovering whose we are, and deciding where we’re going. We are to bring our gifts for healing and transformation, not withholding them from our beloved community.

Healing is available to everyone. Everyone's gifts for healing and transformation are valued. Jesus reached across all cultural and socio-economic-religious lines to offer healing and call forth people's gifts. When we receive healing, a priceless investment in us, then it matters what we do with that investment.

Many of us experience healing, even transformation. We experience it and even make meaning out of it. We give thanks for the experiences and talk about them from time to time—even getting a warm, fuzzy feeling. We have these responses, but we are not fundamentally changed. Our experiences become like beautiful china and silver we place on the shelf or in the cabinet and never use!

The purpose of healing is not to fix our warts or ease our pain. It is good to be thankful, but that is not enough, maybe not even all that important. The purpose of healing, rather, is to invite us to become healers and transformers ourselves—to invest ourselves and our gifts in others. I invite you to consider for yourself:

- When have you experienced healing or transformation in your life?
- How has that changed you?
- What changed in your lifestyle, etc.
- What is still waiting to be realized?
- What step can you take today to move in the direction of that change?

There is another passage of scripture to consider:

the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ⁴Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7)

The author of Jeremiah tells us to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” The people of Jeremiah's time were defeated militarily. They were demoralized and devastated. Their leaders and most brilliant people were either killed or imprisoned. Their identity as a people was taken away. Their understanding of Yahweh God's preeminence was shattered.

How would they respond? Jeremiah counseled to live fully in the place of their exile, to sink down their roots for as long as they lived in the place of exile—to make it their home. Bless it and seek its blessing for in that they would find their own blessing. I suggest that you and I are in exile, perhaps on a distant journey in our lives--searching for meaning or for community, seeking to know ourselves and our purpose more deeply.

Crossroads is a community where many live while they live in exile. Our roots as a congregation were in exile from another congregation. Crossroads was begun for the purpose of having company in the exile. This congregation offers life and sustenance to many in exile. It is a safe place to ask your questions, a receptive place to share your wisdom. Crossroads also benefits from those who come on that path. Each of you, whether you're a charter member or one who has chosen to join this community or one who is visiting, each one is welcome. Each one is

valued. We never know which person who comes here will discover new life for themselves. We never know who will make the difference for us—who will make a difference for the welfare of this body.

Jesus called us to heroic living, to strive in the midst of all the challenges of life and all the resistance we face. We are called to make a difference perhaps even like that mythical hero Don Quixote of la Mancha:

To dream the impossible dream
To fight the unbeatable foe
To try when your arms are too weary
To run where the brave dare not go.” (*Impossible Dream from Man of LaMancha*)

Dare to invest yourself in the lives of others and in your own life. Invest your life here, through this congregation. Begin today. Begin with a commitment to have a conversation. Get to know someone else in this room better. To follow Jesus means to approach life the way he did. It means to embrace the freedom God offers all of us. Take the risk! Find the courage! Be the one who makes the difference in Jesus’ name.

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?” ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

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